MMR_0580 John Parker

The Barren Creek & Santa Fe Railway Story HO

by John Parker MMR #580

In 1952 the teacher asked the eight-year-old what he wanted to be when he grew up. Without a moment's hesitation I replied, "an engine driver"! Well I never got to become one, but my love of trains has been with me most of my life. That same year I was given a Hornby windup train set and I was hooked.

In 1955 I was the proud owner of a Tri-ang electric passenger train set, and by 1962 I had joined the original NMRA Southern Cross Region, and discovering my lifelong passion for the Santa Fe Railway. It was in 1964 that I was greatly encouraged by Keith Bell and impressed with his marvelous period layout, the "Barren Creek Railroad"

In 1966 I left the NMRA-SCR when other priorities in life took me down on a new track. Nonetheless, by the mid-1970s I had joined the "Santa Fe Rwy Historical & Modelling Society" and have been a member ever since.

Encouraged by Keith Bell in 1996 I started building my first HO-scale layout, which was initially a very slow process. However, when I retired in 2000 the progress of my layout suddenly accelerated. When Keith passed away, I renamed my layout, the "Barren Creek & Santa Fe Railway" as a tribute to my mentor and longtime friend. Also in 2000, I joined the current NMRA so I could come up to speed with the latest developments in this great hobby and make many new friends.

Eventually the BC&SF steadily grew to occupy three rooms (totaling approx. 24x10 feet or 7x3 metres) in my free-standing garage/shed. It is an 'around the walls' layout, split over three levels. Access to the front and rear rooms is via two double deck swinging gateways, while a "nod-under" is located at the top level as you enter through the front door. The lower deck of these two swinging gateways handles the traffic on the low level, while the upper deck handles the middle level branch line.

AT&SF first generation diesels are the dominant BC&SF motive power on this quasi–New Mexico branchline set in 1952-1956 era. They are controlled by a CVP EasyDCC system using walk-around RC hand throttles. The DCC system is almost exclusively used for the track power while an auxiliary 12v DC system powers the access swinging gate alarms, structural effects lighting, switch motors, turnout and signal indicators, etc. The signals were kitbashed and the lights simply reflect the adjacent turnout settings

Early days saw some use of Peco code 75 flexitrack and turnouts, although I soon learnt to hand lay track and build my own turnouts (*points*) using code 70 rail for main line and code 55 on branch lines and switching (*shunting*) tracks. There is a small amount of code 100 flexi-track in a few "hidden" locations. While I strive for a minimum 24" radius curves, there are a couple "tight spots" with short 18" radius arc segments used as a compromise.

Turnouts located in hard-to-reach places use "Tortoise" turnout motors, and electrically connected slide DPDT switches work the manually operated turnouts elsewhere. All turnouts are identified with an identity number (and a colour) which is reflected on a nearby LED display panel. The manually thrown turnout DPDT slide switches also have a small corresponding coloured post inserted beside each throw bar. Visitors (*who choose to ignore the display panel*) can thus visually identify the correct turnout when manually throwing that same coloured turnout switch embedded along the edge of the layout.

Originally, I envisaged running trains over the simple continuous loop on the lower level. However, after being bitten by the "operating bug" on Gerry Hopkins' "Great Northern" layout, a branch line was built from Bell Junction via a helix to the middle and upper levels to service places along its right of way before looping back (*in the rear room*) at Easton Tower. The following schematic track plan is designed to illustrate the logical design of the Barren Creek & Santa Fe Rwy.

The following is a brief functional overview of the BC&SF starting with the early continuous loop on the low-level and then eastward from Bell Jct up to the Easton return loop on the upper level.

This is a short stub track to a small freight house (*adjacent to Bell Jct*) in the front room. I included some nearby abandoned narrow gauge track to suggest an historical backstory for the original "Barren Creek Railroad" which became insolvent during the Great Depression and could not afford to repair a nearby wash out. It was subsequently acquired by the local Parker family, and then the AT&SF Rwy acquired 49% of their shares. The Parkers and the AT&SF rebuilt the narrow-gauge track as a standard gauge railroad, and renamed the new railroad as the "Barren Creek & Santa Fe Railway".

CALDERA JCT

In the middle room (*adjacent to Bell Jct*) there is an accessible large "hollow mountain" which hides three overlapping reversing loops and the new branch line (*via a helix*) to Barren Creek. All rail traffic within this area is protected electronically by a switch panel (*as represented by the interlocking tower at Caldera Jct*

WESTERN STAGING YARDS

The lower level occupies the front and middle rooms with the mainline being a continuous loop around the wall of these two rooms. There are two opposing stub staging yards between Caldera Jct and Bell Jct are on the opposite wall where the AT&SF mainline passes between them to conveniently handle both incoming and outgoing trains.

BELL JCT

The hub of railroad activity is located at Bell Jct (in front room), which serves as an interchange between the AT&SF and BC&SF lines. Also, at Bell Jct is a 5 track stub freight yard (with a mirror beneath a scratchbuilt highway overpass to create the illusion that these tracks extend into the distance.

THE BRANCH LINE

Eastbound BC&SF traffic from Bell Jct climbs a steep 2.5% grade helix over a "mountain" (in the middle room), passing through Pinon Canon (Pine Canyon) and then descending to cross over a curved wooden trestle before arriving at the Barren Creek depot.

BARREN CREEK

Is located in the middle room on the mid-level. The switching tracks at Barren Creek were designed to include various degrees of difficulty to challenge visitors (who pride themselves on their switching skills). It has a small diesel switcher permanently stationed there to assist any beleaguered switching crew. Also, among the various industries, there is both the popular "Cruisers Cafe" and "Rocky's Tavern" to snag any passing tourist trade.

SWINGATE JCT

Continuing eastward (over the upper deck of the rear swinging gate) to the nearby train order station at Swingate Jct, where it joins another branch line. This second branch line passes through the notional town of Fort Dunmore (in the rear room) to return to Swingate Jct via a mid-level reversing loop. This allows trains to turn around without having to go down the helix to Bell Jct. It also has a single stub staging track at Swingate Jct for added operating options.

ISADORE

The BC&SF mainline (on the mid-level) continues eastbound up a straight 2% grade along the wall towards the front door, where it passes (over the upper deck of the front swinging gate) onto a double track passing loop at Isadore (in the front room). Beyond Isadore the double track climbs through a tunnel (beneath the upper level) and upon exiting this tunnel the track merges into

single track as it negotiates along a narrow ledge known as "The Escarpment." Eastbound trains may require a helper over this torturous reverse curve on a 2.5% grade as they enter another tunnel before exiting onto a bridge high above Pinon Canyon (in the middle room). The track continues the climb up "The Hill" and through a final tunnel to arrive at San Miguel (on the top level back in the front room.

SAN MIGUEL

Upon exiting the tunnel (on the upper level, near Rio Verde) the single mainline splits into 3 tracks to handle any possible traffic congestion. Beyond the San Miguel station these 3 tracks merge back into two main line tracks with a single crossover approaching the Summit train order station. The depot at San Miguel is a standard AT&SF "County design" with stucco rendering and Spanish-style tile roof.

It is the largest depot on the BC&SF and a reminder of those halcyon days when passengers preferred rail travel to airlines and freeways. San Miguel also boasts a highly popular trackside cafe (Molly's Country Kitchen Café) and two trackside industries as well as a diesel refuelling and sanding facility servicing the 4 diesel switchers assigned to San Miguel, Rio Verde and Rowlands Freight Yard.

RIO VERDE

A separate branch line (from the western end of the Rowlands freight yard) passes behind the Summit train order station, across a steel girder bridge (above Isadore) and goes behind the San Miguel depot to continue onto Rio Verde where the BC&SF diesel locomotive shed and freight car repair workshops are located.

SUMMIT

Continuing eastward from San Miguel, all traffic arrives at the Summit train order station which is located on the upper level (above the front door "nod-under.") At this point eastbound traffic can either enter or bypass the western end of the Rowlands freight yard.

ROWLANDS

Beyond Summit the east and west bound mainlines skirts past the Rowlands depot towards Easton Tower (in the rear room). The double-ended Rowlands freight yard takes up the entire length of the front and middle rooms along one wall. Local freight can also be switched behind the Rowlands depot to where there are also some local trackside industries. There is a switching lead at the western end of the freight yard which is also used as the branch line to San Miguel and Rio Verde.

Design

The freight yard has a caboose and MOW track, an interchange track, four classification tracks (holding max. 57 x 40' freight cars), with both an inbound (receiving) and outbound (departure) track, and run-around tracks at each end. This yard though small compared to others, it tries to feature most of the freight yard's essential functionality which can keep the yardmaster and switching crews busy as they process both local and through freight trains.

EASTON

Inside the rear room the eastbound track loops back on itself thereby making all traffic westbound. Alongside it is a passing (or layover) track where trains can be held over to allow other trains to pass by. Located within this reversing loop is the Easton staging yard with five stub ended tracks. Physical access to the rear room is not normally required as all

operations are done (from the middle room) via CCTV and an overhead track panel where turnout switches are power routed to Tortoise switch motors. Consequently, accidental derailments are few and it effectively controls the traffic flow. Westbound traffic returns past the Easton Tower and on toward either the Rowlands depot or to enter the eastern end of the Rowlands freight yard.

CONCLUSION

You may be wondering why there is no trackplan included with this story. From day one I preferred to put my trust in my crude homemade plywood track curves, a tape measure, imagination and my mental visualisation as I set out the BC&SF layout. The two short 18" curve segments (mentioned earlier) within the helix didn't quite work as well as I had hoped for, but using diesel motive power exclusively, it mitigates any potential issue.

So, there you have it! When looking at the photographs of my BC&SF layout I hope you enjoy the trip as much as I have had creating it.

John Parker MMR #580

"Santa Fe, All the Way ... Downunder"